

Never Forgotten

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Summary: They all thought he was dead. The Arbiter knew otherwise. When he goes out into the deep reaches of space, he finds the one person who has ever meant anything to him, and brings him home. Slash Arbiter/Master Chief

## 1. Chapter 1

Cryo sleep has a way with tricking the mind. Makes you relive memories as if they were happening once more. Brings out your deepest dreams and desires and turns them into reality.

Master Chief knew, as he was dragging his bruised and aching body into that upright chamber, that while it was the best chance for his survival, the odds of waking up again. Well...

John always played against the odds. But this time the chances were slim.

Cortana knew it as well, but merely joked about it.

'Wake me if you need me.' He had told her.

And her smile had been strained as she replied, 'Of course.'

This ordeal would be hard on her too. AI's had an average lifespan of five years. If they were never found, she would go before he did.

Which is why, when the grogginess of waking amid the hiss of the cryo chamber came as a surprise to the Spartan.

Was he dreaming?

He had to be.

It wasn't to Cortana's face, to her voice, but to the striking features of an Elite masked in a space helmet.

The Arbiter.

It took all of a minute before the Chief could bring himself to ask, voice full of doubt, "...Arbiter?"

The Sanghelli himself was having trouble taking it all in. He had argued countless weeks with his higher ups about sending out a search party. When they hadn't been forthcoming, he almost resorted to treason to take the low class space craft he ended up with. The humans were using all of their manpower defending their almost lost Earth from the remnants of the Covenant, all while rebuilding what had been destroyed or glassed.

It had been specifically Johnson, who lay all tubed and weary in a hospital bed, who had gotten him the means.

'You find that SOB, and you drag his sorry ass home, you hear?' The Sergeant made him promise.

'Of course.' Thel Vadum' had acquiesced, as though this mission hadn't been doomed to failure from the beginning.

The once fallen Commander had taken his shuttle, and had put himself to sleep while he traveled through slip space, programming his ship to wake him should it detect any anomalies.

It had taken two years.

But the Arbiter had still been shocked when he was awoken to find the half of the frigate that had been left behind. It was drifting, eerily silent, against the black expanse of space. He didn't even know the Demon would still be inside there, much less be alive.

Thel's voice was so quiet it was almost nonexistent as he murmured, "Yes."

He had wanted to say more. Wanted to spill everything he had locked away during their battles. Against each other and alongside. He took the blame for losing the Chief.

He couldn't sleep nights.

Couldn't function during the day.

But it was more than guilt. As he took in that familiar missed golden visor. That hardened green armor, he knew it was so much more.

"You found me." It was meant to be a question, but came out more as a statement of fact.

If anyone had discovered him, Chief pegged it more to be the UNSC. Or some other alien life form.

But the Elites?

The Arbiter...

Flashes of vivid dreams spun through the Chief's head. Ones where they fought side by side. Ones where they were closer than they should be. Images of what never happened. What never could be.

He shook his head to dispel the thoughts like they were cobwebs.

It hadn't been the UNSC. It hadn't been any other Elite.

The \*Arbiter\* had found him.

And it warmed his hardened Spartan heart like nothing else could. And it puzzled him.

Then he realized, shouldn't the AI have warned him?

"Cortana?" He asked gruffly.

"She is as Johnson said she would be. She has powered down, to retain and preserve her limited lifespan and energy reserves. Hibernation, he called it."

"Sergeant Johnson?" Master Chief said incredulously. The UNSC may not have gone looking for him, but he should've realized with as tough as the Sarge was, that he wouldn't have quit on him either.

"My... Sanghelli forces were less than forthcoming in lending me assistance for the search. The UNSC were busy defending Earth. Rebuilding too. But your Sergeant is very loyal. And very... demanding." Thel replied. At the curious tilt of the Demon's head, he clarified, "He made me promise to 'drag your sorry ass back home', hmm."

Chief chuckled, "He always was a hard man, even with those that weren't still green behind the ears."

At the questioning gaze, Chief merely shook his head, "Forget it. Let's get outta here. Spent enough time in this frigate."

"Could not have said it better myself, Demon." The Arbiter commended, extending a helping hand.

Master Chief looked at the proffered assistance for a moment, glancing up that muscled arm to the face behind the Elite visor, that was observing him just as silently.

The Arbiter had given -had risked- a lot shooting off on some half-hearted search mission that should have failed. But he knew the Arbiter. Fighting alongside him, he knew him better than some underlings and his superiors. Thel never did anything with half his heart.

The fact that the Elite was out here at ALL, had \*found\* him, well... the Chief was touched.

"Thank you." Master Chief said quietly, conveying everything in those two words.

And the way the Arbiter jerked in shock, he knew Thel got the message.

As the Chief clasped his arm, the Sanghelli pulled him strongly to him, letting the Spartan activate his gravitational boots to stand on his own feet. When they were breaths apart, Thel admitted forcefully, "I would \*never\* abandon you, Demon."

There was a tense moment. Charged with everything they wouldn't say. But everything that was meant. Everything they could only hope to share.

Master Chief nodded, and started walking, the Arbiter falling in step beside him.

"Once we get back to Earth, I'm buying you a drink."

"I don't drink."

When the Spartan looked at him, the Sanghelli couldn't help but relent, "But for you, I will make that exception."

"Good." Master Chief grinned in his golden visor.

Though he couldn't see it, Thel could feel it. And he simply nodded, smiling back.

## 2. Chapter 2

He was never one for the bar scene. But with the Arbiter sitting across from him, looking equally as appalled as both off duty humans \*and\* Elites were making drunken fools of themselves, John couldn't help but chuckle.

Thel Vadum' shot a cocked brow at the Demon, his unspoken statement heard through the dry gaze alone:

'Do you \*see\* why I do not drink?'

"I get it." The Chief chuckled again, ignoring the stares around him as he downed his mug of beer. It wasn't just because he appeared to be talking to his drink, but because he had that helmet propped, unworn among the discarded peanut shells atop the table. He heard awed whispers of Spartan and good look all around. But he was used to it.

Not quite used to the way the Arbiter stared, though. Yeah he did have artfully proportioned facial features, a good head of solid black hair on his head, and he was told 'stunningly' blue eyes. But he never cared for it. The only visible scar was the one across his nose from being hit across the face and knocked around in his Spartan suit. Gel padding and advanced armament could only do so much. So while he could easily ignore the others' stares, when he caught the intense gaze of the Arbiter, he couldn't quite make the heat that curled up from his belly go away.

The other three occupants on the table didn't seem to notice, however.

"Sarge?" One undoubtedly drunk marine slurred, his Hispanic accent thicker as he inquired for the hundredth time, "Shouldn't you still

be in the hospital?"

"Ramirez, like I told you the other million time, shut yer goddamn yap. Ain't nonya business what I do on my spare time. Can outdrink a greenhorn like yerself any friggin' day, regardless if I'm in a full body cast or not." Sergeant Johnson retorted, drink sloshing on the table as he slammed his mug down in emphasis.

The Chief agreed with the young Marine, but he knew better than to argue with the Sarge. That never had a happy ending.

As they continued to banter away, Chief looked once more around the bar, overhearing a drunken conversation nearby.

"-yeah, I know. Lisa slept with one of them the other night. She said he was HUGE and just \*really\* good in bed-"

John nearly choked on his drink, head down as he listened more intently.

They could NOT be talking about what he thought-

"No, I know. Elites, who knew they'd be great in the sack!"

Unthinkingly, the Spartan's blue gaze flicked up to see the Arbiter watching him intently. Had he heard too?

Images of dreams he had thought forgotten pushed themselves to the surface without the Spartan's consent. The Elite's tall form. The way that body would move gracefully between silken sheets. The imagined sounds.

Chief cleared his throat.

The imagined heated caresses.

Suddenly he didn't think hanging out with the Arbiter was such a good idea. That stare had heat rising, unbidden, to his naked face.

He made to stand, reaching for his helmet just before, a mumbled excuse about to tumble through his lips. But a large hand atop his own stopped him, a deep voice questioning, "Hold, Demon. What is that change in your complexion?"

"Too much to drink." Chief lied.

"You have consumed about 11 tankards of alcoholic beverages and have not once altered in shade or color, I doubt it is because of the drink." Thel caught him in the lie.

The Elite was too smart for his own good.

"And you hardly touched yours." Chief, nothing else to say, shot back.

"I do not prefer the dulling of the senses. But I have tasted it. For you. As promised." The Arbiter pointed out.

"Well, it must be the dulling of the senses you mentioned earlier

getting to me. I'm gonna call it a night." The Spartan got to his feet, reaching once more for his helmet.

But the gear was scooped up and tucked safely at the Arbiter's side, as he rumbled, "Allow me to assist. You do not have the full capacity of your faculties. I will escort you to your quarters."

Reminding him exactly the kind of thinking that had gotten him into this mess in the first place, the Spartan felt his face flush a deeper scarlet. How naked he felt without that gold visor. He cursed inwardly, noticing the intensely curious look about the Elite as he observed with a tilt of his head.

"It is happening again." He stated deeply.

"I don't want to be a bother." The Chief rushed to explain, speech stiff as he tried to cover up his woes, "It's just a helmet. And we are in neutral territory. Earth is the last place that'll be seeing some action for a while."

"It is no trouble. I insist." Thel would not back down.

The Sanghelli could hardly believe the crease furrowing the Demon's brow. Was the Spartan showing signs of concern?

John floundered for an excuse. If only it were as simple as saying 'no' to be done with it.

"C'mon Chief. Cut the Arbiter some slack. He found you, out in the middle of nowhere, between the asteroids of Tanzania and in the quadrant of hell-knows-WHERE. He prob'ly jus' makin' sure you don't get your sorry ass lost somewhere again." Sergeant Johnson butted in, before turning with his beer back to his other conversation.

The black man hadn't said it. But the words were implied.

He owed the Arbiter.

BIG time.

And if he wanted to walk the Spartan to his room, why the hell not?

Not like anything could go wrong.

### 3. Chapter 3

When shuffling to find a good place to ambush or snipe an entire base full of Covenant, the dark sky was always a welcome cloak. But when you were being escorted to your quarters for the night, with the one being in the entire universe you owed \*everything\* to, but could never express it in words, well...

The evening breeze felt nice. The stars and moon lit the walkway nicely.

But the silence of the night weighed heavily around them.

Master Chief cleared his throat, shuffling anxiously as he glanced

sideways at his equally silent companion. The towering Sanghelli was going at an easy gait, eyes forward as he was consumed by his own thoughts. The Spartan's naked gaze trailed down that sculpted build to his helmet held ransom under that powerful arm.

He considered things he could say. Excuses he could make.

'That looks heavy...'

No.

'You look tired, let me hold that for you.' Before promptly sprinting away.

Nope.

'You travelled across the universe to save my ass, the least I can do is hold my own helmet.' Yeah, that one sounded doable.

When he looked up, the excuse died in his throat as he found that intense gaze back on him.

Suddenly, the drinks and the heavy gaze made it warmer than comfortable for the Spartan. He diverted from the path, fuzzy on his thoughts.

As the Chief pulled off to the side in a secluded garden, the Elite asked, "...What are you doing?"

The top of his armor had clanked on the ground before the Spartan knew what he was doing.

"I... uh..." John was at a loss for words. Not wanting to sound completely out of his mind, instead of saying 'have no idea', finished with, "what does it look like? Too warm."

The Elite waved off the strange reply, hand gliding through the breeze, "I find the temperature... adequate."

When he turned back to the Chief, he took note of scars on the back of the Demon's hands, the only skin showing outside of the long-sleeved black body suit. He was immediately at the other's side, human hand in his grasp as he demanded, suddenly angry, "What are these?"

John, surprised at the sudden closeness of the other, could only shrug, "Augmentations. I have similar scars throughout the Spartan project, but these on my hands are more sensitive-"

A strangled, whimpering and alien noise shot out of the Chief's throat as the Arbiter boldly caressed the captive hand.

His original intent was merely born out of curiosity, never having seen such deep, and apparently self inflicted, scar on the Demon. His eyes shot upwards back to the Chief's startled blues at the sound.

John had never been intimate with another being. Had never so much as shook hands with someone else without gloves or his armor on. The fact that the Elite managed to wrench such a vocal reaction from him

was... unexpected. He knew the scars were sensitive. But he was caught off guard by just how \*good\* it had felt to have someone else, no... to have the \*Arbiter\* touch his bare skin.

Hoping to god the other hadn't notice, John tried to will away the furious flush that heated his cheeks. Thankfully, that intense ebony gaze flickered down back to his exposed hand, the Elite barely audible as he inquired, "So this was done to you purposefully, marked by your own people...?"

The Elite's free hand placed itself subconsciously against his own chest armament, echoing the pain of the terrible burn and burden.

"Yes..." The Chief trailed, trying to tug his hand back. He didn't want the Arbiter eliciting another embarrassing reaction from him.

The Arbiter didn't miss a thing, however.

That gaze was back on the Chief's face. Taking in the current pink flush, his own physical touch, and connecting the dots.

John had a sinking feeling.

Before the Chief could pull his hand back the Sanghelli brushed his free hand purposefully over the scar once more.

With anyone else, this wouldn't have been a problem. But he had craved a physical kind of contact with this particular Elite for far too long. Had hidden it far too long, for his body to keep silent any longer. John barely had time to clench his jaw, but it didn't stop the second, sinful moan from escaping.

With an audible growl, the pieces all clicked into place and the Sanghelli had the Spartan shoved against the garden wall, the trees and brush covering them like a green curtain.

"You have been keeping secrets." Thel growled, eyes taking an accusatory light.

John's eyes widened at the sudden turn in events, body sluggish in the drunken haze, his counter moves effectively rendered useless as the Elite used his own body to pin the Spartan's.

Unbidden, Master Chief's mind had dreams, obscured wisps of want and longing, intermingling with images of the Elite. Naked. Between the sheets. Unstoppable heat rushed to further darken his cheeks as he remembered.

Remembered all the hot dreams that had come to him during his cryo sleep, while he lay in blissful slumber in that unforgotten frigate. Imagined scenes where he would submit to the every single animal need the Arbiter demanded of him. Fleeting senses of him enjoying every moment.

A flash of guilt shimmered in those blue eyes before the Spartan's look hardened. He could still salvage this. Arbiter did not need to know.



Need never know.

"No secrets. Told you, they're sensitive." The Spartan bit out in explanation.

That Sanghelli gaze hardened as well, "Truly? And your explanation for your darkening of hue?"

"The drinks." The Chief offered once more.

The Arbiter was deathly still for a moment.

The Chief held his breath. Waiting. Hoping the Arbiter would accept his flimsy excuses.

"Demon?" The Arbiter said slowly, his thumb trailing dangerously close to the scar on the captured hand. He watched as the Spartan's breath hitched, gaze darkening, "Are you not curious why I traversed half the galaxy to find you?"

"You're a good soldier. A loyal friend. I didn't need to know why. I just knew you... I could never repay the debt I owe you." Master Chief answered truthfully.

Arbiter was touched, his mandibles working thoughtfully before he answered, "You, Demon, are... irreplaceable. I didn't search for you out of my own loyalty or honor, but because I... I could not live with myself if I had a chance to find you, and did not take it."

"So you did."

"Which is why I do not appreciate your deceitful tactics."

"Well \*I\* don't appreciate being shoved against a wall."

Arbiter's gaze narrowed, "You do not yet know the meaning of the word."

"Is that a threat?" Master Chief growled.

He was slightly tipsy, but he was not completely incapacitated. He could take whatever the Arbiter could-

Then there was that thumb over his scar again.

And the Chief barely bit back the moan.

"There." The Arbiter's tone was clipped, as if he was barely restraining himself from simply pounding the other against the wall, "Do you see?"

"FINE." John admitted, much to the Sanghelli's surprise. His breath ragged as he growled, "I've always admired you."

"Just \*admired\*?" The Arbiter pushed.

"Do you want to fuck or not?" Master Chief evaded with another growl.

Smirk to his mandibles, the Elite descended on the pinned Spartan. He

did NOT need a second invitation.

End  
file.